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THE HISTORICAL  
PRECEDENT FOR THE  
NEW ARMY

BY

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## THE HISTORICAL PRECEDENT FOR THE NEW ARMY

THE great wars at the end of the eighteenth century give the only real precedent for the present war in Europe. It is, however, a precedent which is strangely mixed, for the situation would be most closely reproduced if we could imagine in those earlier wars a struggle between Revolutionary France and Napoleonic France. There is so much on the side of the Allies of that day which seems to belong to an old world. The small monarchies which confronted the Revolution are for the most part historical facts which Europe has left behind, although, through Napoleon, they have handed down an evil tradition of dynastic diplomacy ; even the larger, more modern Powers which overthrew Napoleon have, despite the national movements which gave them strength, something of the unreality of an ancient epoch, so hard is it now to grasp the pretensions of the Holy Alliance as being the real concepts of modern statesmen. But the spirit of the Napoleonic empire is still a modern factor, for the Germans are conscious imitators of its methods, and particularly of the errors which notoriously led to its fall ; and on the other side it is possible to see in this struggle a last assault on the new principles of the Revolution, an assault conducted with the same devotion to over-minute efficiency, the same highly capable yet often amazingly stupid bureaucratic administration, the same excessive regard for material motives, and contempt for the feelings of men, which

marked the rule of Napoleon—an assault, however, which is being met not merely by the same weapon of nationality, but by the true hope of liberty, equality, and fraternity which were the first principles of Revolutionary France.

It is curious also to see the parallelism between the two great wars even on the military side. I would illustrate this by two campaigns, one Napoleonic and one Republican. The former I need not describe in detail, for it is a precedent only for the Germans; the latter I would develop at more length, for it is a remarkable and an encouraging precedent for England. The miniature of the present campaign in Europe is the campaign in Saxony in 1813. At the conclusion of the armistice Napoleon stood in Saxony with perhaps 440,000 men opposing the converging attack of 510,000 allies, a numerical disparity which was balanced by his central position. Yet in spite of his splendid conceptions and the skilful combination of his troops, so comparable in that small area to the German use of the strategic railway system, he was ruined utterly by the same elements which again are on the side of the Allies, by the exhaustion of his troops and his marked inferiority in reserves, by the gradual failure of his supplies in food and material, and above all by his impossible attempts to maintain the offensive at all costs and on all sides; and the sudden collapse of Leipsic was consolidated by the desertion of his former ally Bavaria, whose position was that of the neutral European States to-day.

The other campaign, the omen of success for the principles of the Revolution, as that of 1813 is the omen of failure for the principles of Napoleon, is the Republican campaign in Flanders in 1793-4. The strategical interest is obvious, for the opposing armies or groups covered almost exactly the line of the present battle of the West,

from the North Sea to Switzerland, and the same incidents are thus being reproduced on the larger scale that the greater intensity of the present war necessitates.

In August 1793, after the failure in the spring of the French offensive both on the Rhine and in Holland, the main French forces on the northern frontier were pivoted on the fortress of Lille, being linked by a weak covering force with a second group on the fortified line from Maubeuge to the Meuse at Givet. Valenciennes was captured, and an advance in the centre promised the destruction of the Maubeuge group, or even the capture of Paris ; but the Austrians did not dare to pursue their success in the centre at the risk of exposing their right flank to the disordered yet still uncrushed army on the Scarpe. In September 1914 the French offensive had failed again both in the east and in the west, and the Germans took the risk which the Austrians declined a century before : they advanced on the centre between the powerful groups of Paris and the Meuse, exposed their flank to Paris, and were beaten in the battle of the Marne. 1793 closed, as did 1914, with the successful defence of the French line. Hondschoote preserved Dunkirk and the left wing, Wattignies rescued Maubeuge and the right, and the two victories foreshadowed the dual advance of the following year : there may have been the same indication in 1914 in the fighting at Ypres and in Champagne. The first three months of 1794 were marked mainly by the intense suffering of the French troops holding their line in winter without supplies and equipment. Then began the dual offensive, its dualism at first accidental, but gradually developing into two main lines of attack. On each wing was obstinate and indecisive fighting : it seemed impossible for the French to maintain themselves either on the Scheldt or on the

Sambre. Near Maubeuge four times in succession they crossed the Sambre and retreated before counter attacks ; in the fateful ground between Ypres, Courtrai, and Lille the advance was so slow as hardly to be perceptible. But Pichegru, though not a genius, was a very obstinate commander, and Jourdan was fighting for his life : their lieutenants, Souham, Moreau, Kléber, Marceau, Championnet, were able men who had survived the purging of war and of the Terror, that awful concentration of the country upon victory. Their men had still, in spite of their privations, the enthusiasm of the Revolution. So suddenly, at last, almost without a recognizable defeat—there was in this campaign none of the formal spectacular battle of the Napoleonic era—the Austrians admitted the pressure of numbers, the pressure of enthusiastic determination, the pressure of events in Poland. They evacuated Belgium and were driven to the Rhine. Strategically, 1794 is a comforting precedent. But this campaign has a still deeper interest owing to the nature of the armies engaged in it.

On the one side were the professional armies of the allied sovereigns, the troops having no better cause than devotion to their dynasties and the hope of spoiling France, the generals being either princes of the German royal houses or old soldiers enslaved by the pedantic details of Austrian military science, the sovereigns fired by the divine right of kings and the principles of benevolent despotism, and attended by diplomatists ever anxious as to the progress of rival interests in Poland.

On the other side was the new army of France, founded on a small professional army, but raised to formidable numbers by a sudden voluntary effort ; and despite the political excesses of the time and the subsequent encroachment of the idea of conquest, there is full evi-



dence that the inspiring motive of this new army was attachment to the principles which the Revolution has bequeathed to Europe.

The French regular army at the end of the reign of Louis XVI was itself not very dissimilar from the British first line army of to-day, and was but little smaller in numbers. Since the ministry of the Marshal Du Muy there had been a marked reaction from the corruption and inefficiency of the preceding era, and this reaction had been accentuated by the American War. Though it had been impossible to break the power of the Court in regard to the reservation of the regimental commands to the higher noblesse, yet the upper grades in the army had been gradually filled by honourable and capable men. Marshals de Ségur, de Castries, and de Broglie, and the younger Maillebois, owed their position to birth as well as to talent, yet mere ability had been recognized in the appointment of St. Germain to the ministry of war, and of de Vaux and Rochambeau, country gentlemen whose birth was too obscure to give them colonelcies at the age of twenty, to the command of armies, after laborious professional careers. Under these progressive leaders the army had seen a constant succession of partial reforms, partial because they were hampered by the influence of the Court, or by the fluctuations of finance and politics. Much attention had been given to military education; Napoleon's own school at Brienne is well known, but there were many others, such as the engineers' college at Mézières, and the artillery colleges of Châlons and Metz: exceptional facilities were given for the education of the sons of retired officers of lower rank, and in these schools a large number of the republican generals had their first training.

Staff work was unusually developed, while more

dubious political missions were employing the energies of men like Dumouriez, Kellermann, and Schérer, Guibert was developing the theory of tactics, d'Arçon and Carnot were discussing fortifications, and young officers like Berthier, Clarke, and Mathieu Dumas were constantly engaged in reconnaissances, even in foreign countries, of which they wrote too copious notes. This intellectual activity was indeed almost excessive: the War Office was choked with memoranda, and when war broke out the committee of defence wasted far too much time in the discussion of the interminable notes which every staff could produce with such facility.

The artillery material had just been reorganized by Gribeauval, and was served by a highly trained corps of officers. As the nobles of the Court disdained a technical education, this arm alone gave a career to the sons of the poorer country gentlemen, such as was Napoleon himself. The artillery consequently lost far less than the other services by the emigration of its officers; of the forty generals of division of artillery appointed between 1792 and 1814, all but four could use the prefix 'de' to their names.

The cavalry suffered more from emigration, but even as late as the campaign of Valmy it was very good, and was continually praised by Dumouriez.

In the infantry, although the reformers could not deprive the Court nobles of their hereditary right to colonelcies, they took care to recruit the subordinate officers and non-commissioned officers from excellent material, usually from the middle classes, for it was these officers who really commanded the regiments. But many of these retired early in disgust at the absence of promotion. Of such men Masséna is the greatest example; the best sergeant-major of his regiment, he



left the army when, in spite of the recommendations of his officers, he could not obtain a commission, and then set up business as a small shopkeeper until the Revolution gave the opportunity to his talents. There were thus numbers of young men, often of middle-class extraction, who had retired as sergeants, and in the regiments many older men of slightly higher birth struggling to live on their pay. Recruitment was entirely on a voluntary system. At the beginning of the Revolution this army consisted of, excluding the Guards, 114 regiments of infantry, mostly of two battalions, and 62 regiments of cavalry, each of four squadrons, with 8 regiments of artillery, each of 20 companies. There were also 106 battalions of Territorials, the composition of which was constantly being altered by the reformers in their efforts to create a more efficient and more numerous reserve. About 200,000 men could be put into the field.

On this small but fairly efficient and well-trained army came the sudden strain of providing for the defence of every frontier of France. Within a year the Republic was maintaining twelve separate armies, those of the North, Ardennes, Moselle, Vosges, Rhine, Alps, Italy, East and West Pyrenees, La Rochelle, Vendée, and Brest. Nearly a million and a half men were in arms, and by June 1794 the two armies on the northern frontier alone contained in the first line, apart from reserves and garrisons, as many men as in the whole regular army before the Revolution. There were no funds for equipment, everything had to be created amidst unexampled political disturbance and financial dissolution. Nearly all the officers had emigrated: 1,900 left France in 1791, and many others followed Lafayette in 1792 and Dumouriez in 1793. And even before the later

emigrations there were no trained generals to command : colonels and majors were rapidly promoted, but all were, as Duhesme admitted, in the infancy of the military art, and not a general in France had ever manœuvred more than a regiment. No effort which England is called upon to make now can be compared in magnitude to the achievement of the smaller population of the French Republic, in raising men, in finding officers, in discovering generals, at a time when the Republic had no trade, no finances, and no command of the sea, and was absorbed in evolving an entirely new political and social system.

The French Government was, it is true, assisted primarily by the military incompetence of its enemies ; but this advantage, which we do not know ourselves to possess now, was more than balanced by the political disunion, the disappearance of the corps of officers, and the want of material resources. These were evident facts, sufficient to shake the confidence of any new army, but the incompetence of the enemy command was not suspected at the time. The German generals were the most learned in Europe, and they were credited then, as now, with a complete mastery of the art of war : their incompetence arose, as we have since discovered, from their adherence to old standards, tactical, moral, and political, and was proved only by the facts of the war. History may show that in this war also the methods of the enemy command have been the greatest resource of the Allies, that the military conceptions of the Germans have in fact not been in advance of their moral and political ideas.

Of the internal elements of success in the creation of the army which recovered Belgium in 1794, the first lay in the existence of a small regular army which had been

largely rejuvenated by the effect of a great colonial war, a force which contained so much good material and which, allowing for the aristocratic basis on which it was constituted, was surprisingly progressive, serious, and hard-working.

It is this which distinguishes the Republican armies from those raised for the Civil War in America. The old army provided almost all the artillery, the greater part of the cavalry, and a very high proportion of the officers of all arms. It bore the brunt of the earlier fighting, and gave the new troops time to gain experience of war and confidence in themselves.

The second great element of success was the voluntary principle, by which the old army was expanded. The French volunteers have been the subject of many special studies, and the results of the volunteer movement need only roughly be sketched. 100,000 national volunteers responded to the first call in January 1791; 200 additional battalions had been formed, and the army raised to 500,000 before the war seriously began in 1792. The invasion of France by the Prussians and the victories in Belgium produced 300 more battalions by the beginning of 1793. These men with the old army formed the main fighting force: many of them had served in the army, or the territorials, or the national guards, and they rapidly responded to training: their superiority lay in the fact that they were intelligent men who knew what they were fighting for, and believed in the greatness of the cause of Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality.

There is indeed a dark side to the picture of the volunteers: insubordination, desertion, and panic were constant incidents in the first three years of war. After the fall of Verdun, for instance, the volunteer regiments involved in the capitulation refused to remain in the

Argonne with Dumouriez, and marched to camp at Châlons, Marceau, who then commanded the Eure-et-Loir battalion, throwing up his post in disgust at the behaviour of his men and joining a line regiment. But indiscipline was almost as marked in the line regiments, and it had a special cause in the political disorders of the time. The same explanation can be given of the constant panics. Time after time, and especially after the regular cavalry had been broken by the desertion of Dumouriez, the new troops fled in shameful terror, abandoning their guns and defensible positions ; but this was less because they were new troops than because of the continual and well-grounded terror of treason, and the incessant changes in the higher command. Desertion also rapidly reduced the effectives both of volunteers and regulars, but this too had a special cause in the extraordinary sufferings of the troops owing to the State bankruptcy and the lack of every kind of equipment. It is the best tribute to the voluntary system that in spite of their privations, so high a proportion of the first volunteers kept to the colours, and that the initial impulse of enthusiasm was never lost to the armies. But with their wastage and the increasing pressure on the frontiers, the desperate need of the Government of the Terror for more troops led to a gradual abandonment of the voluntary principle, and recourse to requisition *en masse* and irregular conscription. There was an immediate decline in moral, and the greater part of the new forced levies disappeared as soon as they reached the front. The difference in quality is represented in the careers of the officers who rose to high rank in the later wars ; the great majority came from the old army, and nearly all the remainder from the volunteers of 1791 and 1792 : scarcely any soldier of the forced levies of 1793 and 1794

rose to be a general officer. The character of the later levies may be illustrated by a story told by Pion de Loches of his own town in Burgundy, called to produce so many men for the army. In the meeting which was called, Pion ingeniously proposed that the town could have no finer representatives than the hottest Jacobins ; this was carried by acclamation, and the town was thus rid of its worst ruffians—but only for a time, for they deserted almost immediately and returned to politics. By the beginning of 1793 all the best military material had in fact joined the armies, the men who for the rest of their lives were proud of having been ' Volunteers of 1791 or 1792 '. That the voluntary system ultimately failed was due partly to the length of the campaign, but mainly to the inability of the Government to provide on even the most moderate standard for the necessities of the troops. As late as 1796 the army of Italy was famished and in rags. The analysis of the armies of 1793-4 shows indeed the immense superiority of volunteer to conscript recruitment, but it also shows that for volunteers a high standard of supply is required.

While it was the voluntary principle which gave the new army its enthusiasm, it was perhaps the territorial principle which gave it cohesion sufficient to withstand the strain of constant privation. The old regular regiments had for the most part territorial names, apart from those regiments which as in the English army were specially associated with the royal family ; but the territorial connexion had for the most part disappeared. The new volunteer battalions were not, however, attached as extra battalions to the old regiments, but were given the names of the departments in which they were raised, while the companies or smaller units often represented particular localities within the depart-



ment. This process was easy, as most of the earlier volunteers had been serving together as the national guard at their own homes. The same system was ever applied to the numerous battalions raised by the city of Paris, each battalion being associated with a special quarter and bearing its name, such as the 1st des Lombards, the Arsenal, the Filles St. Thomas. There were also some special battalions representing professions, as in the new English army. Of these the Arts battalion was the most famous; but most broke up at an early date. The advantage of a system by which all the soldiers and officers in the battalion were of the same *pays*, knowing each other by reputation, need hardly be insisted on. Many of these local battalions, such as the first Isère, the 4th Moselle, the 1st Ile et Vilaine, made their names as famous as those of the regular regiments. But this wise provision was neglected in the later levies *en masse*, who bore vague names like Fédérés, Volontaires Nationaux, or the absurd titles of Jacobin fanaticism, a cause which may well have contributed to their more rapid disintegration.

The force of circumstances compelled also to a large extent the territorialization of the armies themselves. A Welsh or Irish army would be no new idea in military organization. Having to meet invasion on every frontier, the French Government formed each army from the line troops of the local garrisons and the volunteers of the neighbouring departments; many of the garrisons had long been resident at their head-quarters, and had been filled up with local recruits. Each army was therefore from the beginning local. The army of Italy, for instance, was predominantly Provençal; that of the Alps was composed of the regiments of Dauphiné, Savoy, and Lyon; and that of the north was based on Artois,

Picardy, Paris, and Normandy. And the local character was maintained by the assignment of certain departments to the maintenance of the armies both in supplies and in men. There were disadvantages undoubtedly arising from this territorialization : the troops were more affected by local politics, desertion and irregularities of discipline were more rife, but the armies gained much by losing a little of that strangeness which must fall on hastily grouped bodies of men if they have no obvious common link. Staff work was considerably facilitated, and so also was the promotion of officers, not to mention the special gain in many cases from the knowledge of the country in which the new troops were fighting.

These, then, were the three elements in the success of the new French army, the obligation to the small well-trained regular army, the voluntary principle, and with it the overwhelming enthusiasm for the political and moral cause for which the army was fighting, and the element of territorial cohesion. All three elements were brought together in the creation of the new corps of officers. The loss of officers by emigration between 1791 and 1793 has already been referred to. Practically all the remaining senior regimental officers, for the most part elderly men who had no other resource than their military pay, at once became colonels and generals, and the Republic had therefore to find officers for both the old and the new forces. It found them very largely in the non-commissioned ranks of the old army, and it may be claimed that the successes of the armies of the Republic and Empire were essentially triumphs of the ranker. Of Napoleon's twenty-four marshals, six had been officers and fourteen non-commissioned officers of the old army. The position is best shown in the case

of individual regiments. In 1793 the famous Navarre infantry regiment had but four left of the thirty-nine officers on its strength in 1789: twenty-eight officers had emigrated. Of the four survivors, one was the quarter-master, one, a lieutenant in 1789, was the colonel, and the other two had risen from sub-lieutenant and cadet to be captains. Eighteen of the new officers were non-commissioned officers promoted from the regiment, five were promoted sergeants from other regiments, and eight were newly-joined cadets. It is, however, remarkable that the wholesale promotion of non-commissioned officers in the regulars did not meet with the same success as their more careful selection in the volunteers. These battalions of compatriots were given the power of electing their own officers, and they naturally chose men with some military training, provided that with their special local knowledge of their companions they felt some confidence in their capacity to lead. Some officers, like Moreau and Gouvion St. Cyr, were, however, chosen though they had no training at all—one was a law student, the other an art student—simply because they were felt to be leaders of men; the volunteers were staking their lives upon the correctness of their choice. Thus in the end the volunteer cadres became better than those of the regular regiments: in the latter men were promoted because they were sergeants, in the volunteers military experience was welcomed, but only if accompanied by education and capacity to lead. It was in this way, through selection by their fellow countrymen, that most of the great generals of the Empire emerged: of the twenty-four marshals, thirteen got their first commission in the new army, and of these, nine were former non-commissioned officers in the old army.

The obligation of the volunteers to the regulars may

be illustrated by the case of the 4th Moselle battalion. In 1793 it had as colonel an old officer of fifty-five, shortly to be commander-in-chief of the whole army corps in which the battalion served : one major had also been an officer, and was sixty-eight ; the other major, who really commanded the regiment, was a retired sergeant who had volunteered : he was still only 31 years of age, and in a few months became general of division. Seven of the nine captains had been privates in line regiments, yet it should be noticed that the officer in the regiment who was to reach the highest distinction, Molitor, Marshal of France in 1823, had had no previous service ; he owed his election as captain only to merit. Nine out of the twenty lieutenants had served as privates. The debt of the new French army to the old was indeed very great : of the 117 infantry and cavalry generals commanding in Napoleon's Grande Armée of 1805, when the corps of officers had been sifted by nine years of war, and by Napoleon's judgement of men, 83 had served in the army of Louis XVI, and of these, 40 had been in the ranks : 34 only were volunteers in origin. Yet the debt to the voluntary system was almost equally considerable : it allowed the non-commissioned officers to emerge rapidly, and it completely revived the army by the admission into the corps of officers of all professions, all classes of society, and all types of ideas. So the French army became national while the allied armies remained for many years professional. The choice of officers by election is perhaps suited only to the peculiar genius of the French people, and in a country less completely democratic the effect of territorialization also is perhaps reduced. The history also of the corps of officers in the armies of 1793 shows that while so much was gained by throwing over the old

aristocracy, the volunteers did trust at first too much to mere professional experience, with the result that in the next few years there had to be a rapid discarding of officers who were too old for active service, and of promoted rankers who were not intelligent enough to command. The French passed in turn from the theory that all officers must be aristocrats to the belief that all must have previous military service, and then even, in a brief period of political fanaticism, to the idea that all officers must be politicians. It was, however, the volunteers of 1791 and 1792, with their system of election, who most nearly recognized the paramount importance of intelligence. The subsequent promotion of the officers was facilitated by the very elastic staff system in the early days of the Republic. Each army had a number of adjutant-generals who were majors and colonels on the staff either at army head-quarters or with the divisions; and each adjutant-general had a number of 'adjoints'. These posts provided outlets for the young regimental officers. The colonel, newly promoted general, would take with him his best captain to be adjutant-general, and the latter would secure some personal friend as 'adjoint': there was in this way constant interchange between the regiment and the staff. This reflects the character of the fighting in Belgium in these early years: there was none of the rigidity of form which Napoleon imposed. Armies were groups ever changing in numbers according to the point of local pressure on the long line from Switzerland to the sea, and the fighting was carried on less by divisions, brigades, and regiments, than by bodies of varying size led by the adjutant-general or even the adjoint. Young officers were helped by the territorial organization in obtaining recognition of their special qualities, and then had as



adjutants unequalled opportunities of learning to handle considerable bodies of troops in the field.

Of the general system of training the volunteers little can be said : military and political necessities left no time for systems. The volunteer movement in 1791 began indeed with a definite scheme of training : large camps of instruction were formed at Paris and other large towns : each battalion had attached to it an active and well-educated non-commissioned officer as adjutant—men like the future Marshals Soult, Augereau, and Masséna. The early levies had therefore a considerable measure of instruction before they saw active service. While also the first battalions of 1792 were sent straight to the garrison towns on the frontier, yet when the war broke out their training was still more important than the fighting. The divisions of Dumouriez at Maulde, of Lafayette at Sedan, of Kellermann at Metz, of Luckner at Châlons, were far more camps of exercise than ' corps of observation '. There were so-called military operations, but the actual work of the troops was rather that of field-days and route-marching, with some skirmishing with an inactive enemy. Real fighting began in September, and the enormous levies which appeared in the enthusiasm of the resistance to the Prussians marched direct to the front ; but Dumouriez was from the first reluctant to use in the firing line any but the best trained volunteers, mainly the regiments of 1791. These he brigaded with the line regiments, two volunteer battalions with every regular battalion, following in this the policy of Lafayette, an officer who from his experience in the American War of Independence was perhaps better able to judge of the capacity and needs of the volunteers than were more professional soldiers like Dumouriez. Meanwhile the newer levies had oppor-

tunities for gaining instruction on lines of communication or in the very numerous frontier garrisons. This was, as regards organization, the best period for the volunteers, whose position then more closely resembled that of the new British army. On them, however, the disastrous retreat from Belgium and the treason of Dumouriez fell with crushing effect. Though the infantry of the line were left comparatively untouched, many of the senior officers of the old school were removed, and these, though incompetent commanders, had been excellent instructors for new troops. The ruin of the regular cavalry sorely tried the moral of the young soldiers, who felt that they had now no protection in the open against the fine Austrian and English horsemen. The collapse of the administrative services, which had been supported largely by the resources of Belgium, enhanced the sufferings of the soldiers and increased desertion. The strength of the volunteer battalions was then greatly reduced, and the numbers could only be brought up by the additions of new recruits entirely untrained.

The figures for a division of the army of the Moselle in July 1793, consisting of 7 line battalions, 6 volunteer battalions of 1791, and 7 volunteer battalions of 1792, show, for instance, that while the regulars had only 270 recruits joining since May, 5,900 of the 12,000 volunteers had only just entered the army. All their training now had to be carried through during active service at the front. This particular division was then commanded by an old Lorraine officer, General Schauenbourg, the most famous infantry instructor of the wars of the Revolution and Empire, who has left interesting notes of the system by which he kept his whole division continually under instruction whenever the enemy allowed

the army to rest. Instruction was the preoccupation of all the good officers, and explains the inactivity on the frontier until late in the year 1793. Training was to some extent facilitated by the dispersion of the troops in garrisons. At the same date, July 1793, of the 160,000 men who held the line from Maubeuge to the sea, 42,000 only are shown in general terms as 'the army' in a mobile covering force which linked up the four entrenched camps held by 55,000 other first line troops, while no fewer than 63,000 were in the second line in 35 separate garrisons in Picardy and Artois; but local politics unfortunately interfered their training almost more than did the enemy's instruction of the first line.

In this strange picture of an army receiving much of its first training in the intervals of fighting there were two salient features, the value placed upon early peace training, as shown by the greater trust given to the battalions of 1791 and 1792 in spite of the large admixture of recruits in 1793, and the success of brigading the volunteers with the regulars: the new troops learned their duties from the old, and in the end, in 1796, the regular battalion was amalgamated into one regiment with the two linked battalions of volunteers.

Most favourable of all aids to the instruction of the new army, and to its transformation into the most formidable army in Europe, was the nature of the fighting in which it had to engage. Marshal Gouvion St. Cyr describes his discussions in the army of the Rhine with his friend Desaix as to the best method of using the new troops. Desaix, an aristocrat, one of the few surviving officers of the old régime, a professional soldier of the best type, wished to show his skill in manoeuvring in the plains of the Rhine valley. St. Cyr, a volunteer of

1791, who, like Moreau, always retained the style and manners of a civilian in spite of his eminent military capacity, insisted that the great training-ground for his new troops was the forest country of the Vosges. Here was the opportunity for small important successes which the enthusiasm of the French troops and the intelligence of their selected leaders could secure, without that strain on the coherent action of masses of troops which was demanded by large operations in the open, and which could only be carried out successfully when the troops were fully disciplined and the leaders fully experienced. St. Cyr perhaps exaggerated; it was less the indiscipline of the troops than the complete inexperience of their generals which unfitted the new army for the 'grande guerre'; Napoleon felt no such difficulty when he had armies of raw troops with veteran generals for every unit. But it is true that the formation of the new army was immensely helped by the natural features of the French frontier, and the character of the fighting which was established by it. The dyke country of Flanders, the woods and farms of Hainault, the mountainous regions of the Ardennes and the Vosges, the Alps and the Pyrenees, all protected the French troops from decisive battles in form, and gave them continual opportunities for displaying their peculiar qualities. In the open the volunteers had no confidence in themselves against the precisely moving professional troops, whose fire tactics were so much more closely controlled. Above all, the French had so few cavalry; cavalry could not be improvised, and by 1794 only twenty regiments had been added to the original sixty-two. The cavalry, too, suffered more by the loss of their aristocrat officers, and several regiments deserted with Dumouriez, while the disorganization of the country made it impossible to reconstitute the regiments by a

proper system of remounts and fodder supply. It was not until June 1794 that the army of the North, then consisting of 300,000 men, could form a single cavalry division. This weakness in cavalry explains the exaggerated fear of that arm, in which the enemy were strong, and was the cause of many panics so scornfully noted by the allied commanders. But when the new troops were fighting in redoubts supported by their fine professional artillery, which was at least equal to that of the enemy in training and material, or when the army had to advance over difficult country by a series of small intelligent movements, their essential qualities were brought out, the military virtues of men who were fighting as volunteers for a cause which each individual appreciated, the innate capacity for leadership in officers who had been chosen by men who knew them and trusted them for these qualities. So the troops in this confused fighting for positions over the long frontier line became more and more warlike, more confident in the superiority of republicans over the 'slaves of the tyrant'. All that was needed was a higher command which would take real advantage of the final element of success in the new French armies, their superiority of numbers, by giving real coherence to these small actions. Finally, by the middle of 1794, a curiously modern solution had been reached. The operations were strategically combined by a rudimentary general staff, a committee deriving its powers from the Committee of Public Safety, but acting with considerable independence. Its members were professional soldiers mostly of the technical arms headed by the engineer Carnot. Under this general staff was General Pichegru, commanding-in-chief from the Moselle to the North Sea. It was impossible for him in those days to control so long a line, but the committee



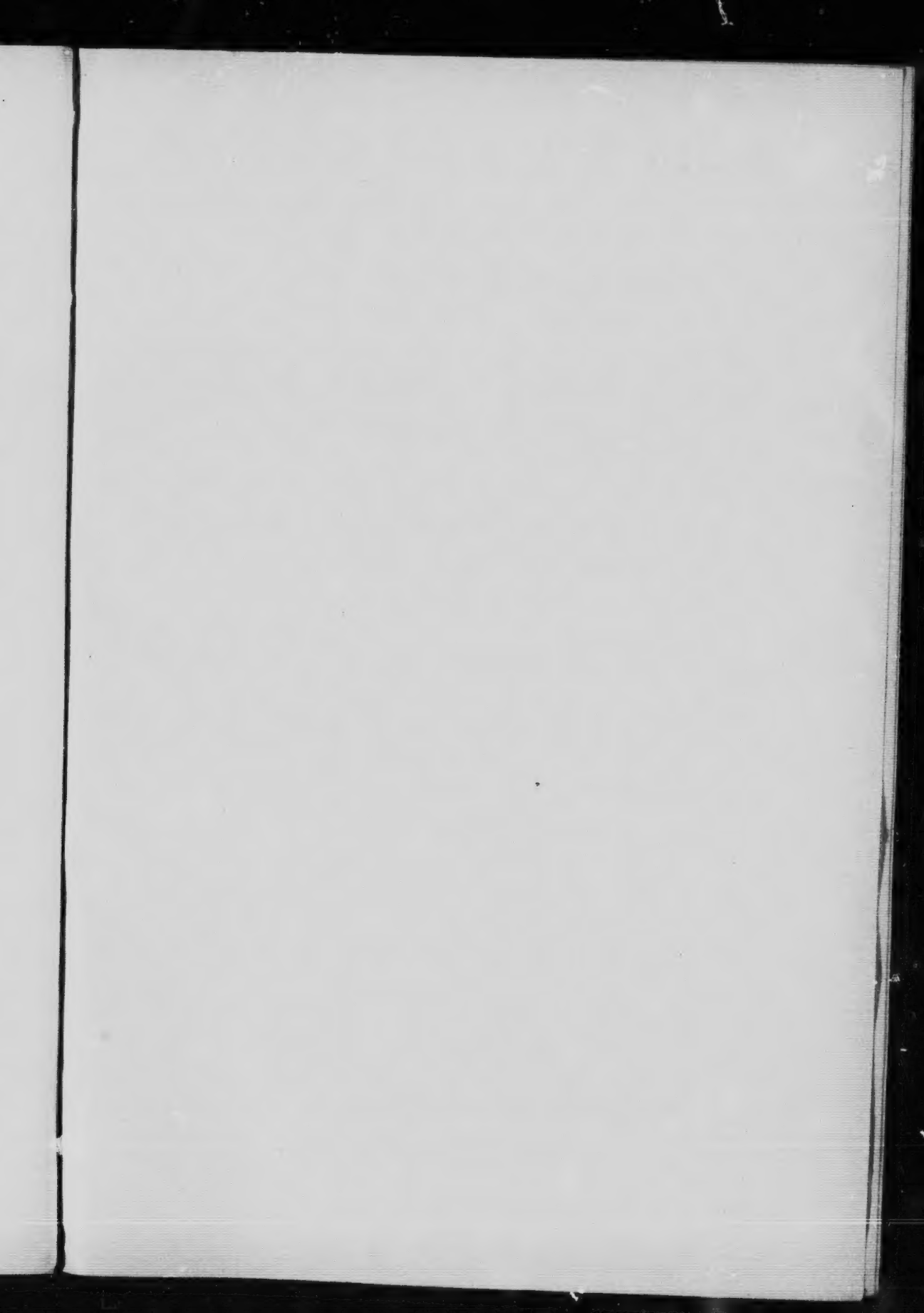
preferred to have a single commander-in-chief, and, even when he won the battle of Fleurus, General Jourdan, commanding the army of the Sambre-et-Meuse, was nominally subordinate to Pichegru.

It is hard to assess Pichegru's services to the army : in his tours up and down the long line he was often absent at critical moments of attack—it was Souham's splendid resolution in the absence of the commander-in-chief which won the victory of Tourcoing ; but Pichegru taught his army commanders to recognize their interdependence, and he communicated to his army his determination, his submission to the Government, his abnegation of personal glory. He and all his principal officers had been promoted from the volunteers, and to this was due the modesty and, for the rest of France and still more for the enemy, the anonymity of the higher command. And so this army of the North which recovered Belgium in 1794 and in 1795 had conquered Holland and the Rhineland remained the most republican and the most modest of the French armies : even in conquests it never became an army of plunderers or an army 'en panache'. It was the national and volunteer army of France, strongly contrasted to the 'mamelukes', the personal army of Napoleon in Italy, created by him and corrupted by him to serve his ambitions. The army of the North had no promises of plunder by bulletin, and its conquest of Belgium and Holland was not marked by the organized pillage and the meditated terrorism which both provoked and subdued the Italians. Even the selfish and calculating Soult, so easily tempted by the opportunities of the Empire, recalled half regretfully in his memoirs the finer emotion of 1794 in the army of the Sambre-et-Meuse. Throughout the Empire there was an undercurrent of hostility

to personal rule from the republican army which had recovered Belgium and the Rhine frontier. In 1798 the disputes between the 'gentlemen' of Bernadotte's division from the Sambre-et-Meuse and the licensed brigands of the army of Italy were a cause of the disturbances in Rome. In Egypt the same rivalry occurred, and the opposition to the personal ambition of Napoleon was led by Kléber. In 1804, not only Pichegru and Moreau, but also Souham, Duhesme, Macdonald, and Delmas were in disgrace, while Jourdan was but grudgingly honoured. Napoleon never entirely won over the conquerors of Belgium.

This, then, is the precedent of a hundred and twenty years ago for the new army of England. Immense must be the differences due to the political disorders of France under the Terror. Yet the example remains of an army facing the same problems on the same ground, an army formed on the nucleus of a fine professional force by an immense voluntary effort, inspired not only by a sense of national emergency, but by enthusiasm for the principles of progress by freedom. And there could be no more encouraging example than that of its ultimate success essentially by its moral qualities, and of its adherence even in the time of conquest to the principles which had given it strength. Victory came, it is true, to the side of the big battalions, but it came at the call of the spirit by which they had been formed.





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